

## Social Freedom and the Value(s) of Friendship

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**ABSTRACT:** This article adds to the debate about the limits of liberalism by arguing that there is a third sphere of freedom that should be considered alongside the public and private spheres. This social sphere of freedom is where individuals engage with one another, sometimes via institutions, in order to pursue interests that cannot be achieved on their own. The social values of this sphere fall under the umbrella of friendship, where friendship norms are ideal for grounding free social relations, are plausible for a relationship that ranges from friendly strangers to more intimate associations, and provides a flexibility able to accommodate different ways of connecting with each other.

**Keywords:** friendship, toleration, decency, social freedom

### Introduction

One objective of liberalism is to expand the domain of individual freedom by constructing a limited domain of permissible interventions. The smaller the area where active, legitimate coercion is permissible, the greater the space of individual freedom becomes. Though liberal theory presents a strong defense of individual freedom, it does so by addressing only one aspect of freedom - political freedom. The arrangements and relations that are created for the sake of civil society are political arrangements grounded in the authority of the state to maintain individual pursuits of private interests. Unfortunately, the conclusion that all else is a matter of individual freedom does not explain much about the needs and conditions of individual freedom in other relations.

Yet liberalism does not ignore other spheres since many theorists treat their accounts as generalizable to all spheres of activity (see Pateman 1985; 1988). Negatively, liberalism generally maintains that the conditions and limitations of freedom in the public sphere are adequate for securing freedom outside of it. Positively, it proffers minimally demanding social values such as tolerance and decency in interaction to accommodate pluralism. Liberal individualism implies that relationships are created and maintained for individuals' pursuits and so prescribes values that allow for the expression of interests without demanding those interests be acknowledged by others (see Kymlicka 1995; Locke 1980; Raz 1986; Rawls 1971; Rousseau 1987; Hirschmann 1992). When applied to social relations, this approach proves inadequate. Many feminists critique liberalism for constructing frameworks that gloss over and misrepresent lived experience

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by promoting values that fail to denote the importance of social interdependence to matters of interaction; this misrepresents individuals' compounded state of interdependence and individual freedom (see Code 1991; Friedman 1993; 1997; 2003; Frye 1983; Held 1984; Kittay 1997; Meyers 1989; Walker 1998; 2003). Lost is the social fact that individuals increase their own and others' freedom through basic interactions. Thus there has been an influx in feminist ethics of analyses of moral values that better capture given relationships and the demands of interpersonal communication. I accept the indictment that liberalism wrongly presupposes the generalizability of its principles. Yet feminists are not clear on whether they demarcate a domain of interaction beyond the public sphere as the target of their prescriptions.<sup>1</sup>

I argue that in addition to the public and private spheres of freedom that together constitute the civil sphere, there is the social sphere of freedom. The social sphere of freedom is where individuals engage one another, sometimes via institutions, to pursue interests that cannot be achieved alone. That is, the social sphere is the ambiguous but concrete, public realm where individuals function more *as* persons than *in* roles. Civil society is more obviously institutional whereas the institutions of the social sphere are not as defined and roles are not foremost. I am Jane Doe and I am always a citizen or teacher but most of my daily interactions revolve around me being "Jane Doe" rather than Jane Doe "the X".

In this paper I sequester the social sphere and its corresponding conception of social freedom - the freedom individuals have to self-determine through social interactions with others - to expand concerns raised by feminist ethicists against liberal values. Feminists rightly tout values such as moral growth, positive concern, openness, and acceptance as crucial to developing cooperative social relations (See Baier 1994; DesAutels 2004; Friedman 1993; 1997; 2003; Held 1984; Kittay 1997; Meyers 1989; Walker 1998; 2003). I believe these social values, all of which - to greater and lesser degrees - fall under the umbrella of friendship, are also apposite to individual social freedom since interdependence needs relatively attentive dealings rather than distanced regard. Friendship norms are not only ideal for grounding free social relations but are plausible since the friendship relation is manifold; the various degrees and forms of the friendship relation, ranging from friendly strangers to friendship proper, provide flexibility to accommodate the ranges of connectivity.

It is important to note how individual social freedom is distinct from simple individual freedom; social freedom is exercised *in* interaction. I can exercise both individual simple and social freedoms publicly - sometimes separately and other times simultaneously - and conflicts can arise between one's simple and social desires. This is why I speak to the task of enhancing social freedom rather than creating social freedom. Connectedness establishes a certain amount of social freedom as well as potential for internal conflict and this is what I think liberalism has been attempting to adjudicate with minimal social values. When social freedom is understood in this way, I hold that the more individuals engage dialogically in social relations regulated by openness, the freer they are to express themselves and communicate in their relations with others.

To advance the feminist project of attending to lived experience I propose a friendship model incorporating these values as an alternative to non-interference models of freedom. I argue that friendship values can enhance rather than impede individual social freedom since friendly encounters foster more meaningful expressions than encounters that proceed from 'mutual disinterest'.<sup>2</sup> I do not propose the friendship model as requisite and obligatory for the existence of

social freedom but rather as a means of enhancing social freedom through multifarious methods of nurturing social relations. The friendship model is meant to be chosen by individuals who want richer social relations. The individuals I have in mind are those who are aware of and concerned with moral progress and liberation. This furthers feminist objectives since it gives those who read but feel inhibited by theory a modest working model for liberating action and can motivate larger moral progress and social change since individuals choosing to act according to friendship norms provide inspiration for others to act in kind.

### **The Social Sphere of Freedom**

The realm of interdependence to which feminists direct much of our moral attention is what I call the sphere of social freedom (see also Card 1996, Ch.1). I use 'social' in the distinct sense of 'sociality', where sociality concerns the constitutive activities of daily life; they are ordinary, routine, and on-going. I largely have in mind recurrent encounters as the context for exercising and expanding freedom, though this extends to one-time encounters. They are, as Jean Keller describes, the 'everyday communicative practices through which we achieve the mutual understanding necessary to coordinate our action plans and create a shared form of life' (Keller 2008.) These activities are constitutive of self-expression since individuality cannot be articulated without others who see and acknowledge the individuating actions - uniqueness in isolation is empty since the value imports from distinction from others. Individual social freedom is dyadic and mutual. The institutions of this sphere are social in the communicative sense in two ways: they concern the constitutive activities of daily life, like going to the Department of Motor Vehicles or the doctor's office, and they are comprised of people who must interact on a personal level. Tasks can be accomplished between individuals occupying roles but tasks are facilitated and 'greased' when done with and as 'people. People tend to respond more amiably and cooperatively when treated as persons - as people who have feelings and unique personalities - than when treated as occupiers of roles.<sup>3</sup> When we treat individuals as mere role occupiers rather than individuals, our exchanges are formal, sterile, and consequently, detached; some might say even cold. When we approach our neighbors and community workers as people worthy of giving just a bit of our uniquely directed attention, public transactions turn into social interactions.

Individuals' development of individuality is a function of the relationships they hold with co-workers, neighbors, and community institutions - their social relations. Our relationships impact the sorts of choices available to us and which decisions we (can) then make. Social freedom is the individual freedom to choose and act with and through others and to partake in the construction of the values, norms, and institutions that shape daily life. Social self-determination is possible because individuals exist in connection but are more or less socially free depending on how their actions encounter interference from others. Moreover, self-determination derives not from sheer non-interference from others but through encountering relatively genial others who either endorse or do not (unjustifiably) attempt to thwart one's communicative actions. Individuals would be unable to exercise social freedom if left entirely to their own devices, even though they are exercising other sorts of freedom.<sup>4</sup> This explains why social freedom is reflexive and dyadic.

When theorists speak of social relations, it is sometimes difficult to get a handle on what they are and how they affect us. In short, social relations are individuals' very real, particular relationships with others. Thus I believe that the best model to frame robust socially free relations is the one most closely related to matters of daily interaction - friendship.<sup>5</sup> The majority of individuals' social freedom is exercised through others whom they know, consider an acquaintance, or could recognize in multiple contexts.<sup>6</sup> Whether interactions take place with the pharmacist, school nurse, or neighbor, freedom is largely exercised in activities with people likely encountered repeatedly and in multiple contexts. These relations require more attentiveness than values like toleration permit but they do not further demand the intimacy of friendship proper. What I am calling 'the friendship model' for social interaction does not require unfamiliars to treat one another as intimate friends but there is room within it for the corresponding norms to be generalized. Therefore, the norms of friendship and friendliness that foster mutuality are valuable to regulating exchanges between unfamiliars who desire more freedom in communication.<sup>7</sup> If individuals aim to enhance social freedom, it is important for them to promote the values of friendship within their relations.

### Understanding Friendship

Friendship norms do not exact unqualified approval of each from the other. Such an assumption would not only make friendship implausible for socially free relations but also set impossible standards for personal friendships themselves. Instead, following Aristotle loosely, I understand friendship values to elicit a general openness to others to be themselves and to *try* to recognize as important those values or life experiences of the other even if they have no relevance to oneself.<sup>8</sup> Marilyn Friedman (1993, p.193, p.194) suggests such values sustain friendships and cultivate moral growth within them. Likewise, if strangers maintain a general openness to others and their interests - to be open to receive from others without necessarily being required to respond - moral growth could be cultivated more broadly via particular interactions. At the very least, exchanges with strangers can become more enjoyable and productive. Everyone has experienced a friendly stranger that allowed the errand at hand to be completed more smoothly. Such encounters brighten our day and inspire us to respond in kind to others, even to those who do not look or live as we do - acts, such as smiling or active listening, that are themselves small but significant aspects of moral growth in daily life. The degree to which we then choose to respond beyond open reception and attentiveness would depend on the extent to which the relation repeats itself and whether we choose to repeat the task performed with that person. For example, I can be friendly *towards* the bank teller or I can be friendly *with* the bank teller and I can choose, supposing this behavior makes me comfortable with her in some sense, to visit her for all of my banking. I can also be friendly towards her but also choose not to visit her again if the treatment is not reciprocated, or even 'just because'. If moral growth engenders some degree of acceptance and comfort bilaterally, interactions with friendly others can encourage those with whom they interact to exercise their social freedom more extensively (Friedman 1993, p.197). Because friendship norms are neither required nor over exacting, prescribing such values in the social sphere makes both theoretical and practical sense.

Keller's description of friendship accentuates important values of friendship relations for social relations. She characterizes friendship as a chosen, discursive relation between relatively

equal partners, characterized by mutual affection and regard, commitment, intimacy, trust, sharing and caretaking (2008, p.161). This level of connectivity is what people aim for in personal friendships and ought to aim for in their social relationships. But experience shows that this is an ideal conception of friendship; to experience such a friendship is truly a blessing. The intense connection manifested in robust friendship relations is the main reason friendship is deemed inappropriate for less familiar relations. Yet this understanding of friendship is not the only way to conceive of friendship or of promoting friendliness.

There is a range of friendship forms that allows for varying intensity in connection - there are good friends, family friends, work friends, acquaintances, and those we simply see around on the train or at the gym and to whom we give the daily nod. The variation of friendly relations makes it suitable for generating and shaping free social relations. Like friendships, reoccurring social relations are discursive and involve choice given that they form through interaction and conversation. Even if social relations are not chosen to the extent that personal friendships are, people can choose how to receive, respond to, and revisit those with whom they come into contact (Schwarzenbach 2009, p.237). For example, I cannot choose who goes to my gym or whom I work with but I can choose to attend to them openly when I encounter them, such as with the passing smile and nod that is characteristic of friendliness. And though very few social relationships can attain the intimacy Keller attributes to personal friendships, the broader condition of openness can address the specific needs of less familiar social relations. Regardless of the intensity of connection, relationships can be sustained so long as the parties have reason to stick around and the capacity for self-expression permitted by openness can provide this motivation. One example of open behavior is the intentional effort on people's part to avoid an encounter with an "odd" looking stranger - where "odd" ranges over anything from a person with piercings and pink hair to a religious minority in traditional garb - with negative presuppositions about her character. Conversely in an open encounter, the small gestures of openness can have a large impact at the receiver's end and affect her impression of the encounter for the better since they indicate a sort of welcoming rather than ignoring. I am more likely to offer to spot someone at the gym who is struggling at the bench press if she has been friendly towards me than someone who has simply stayed out of my way or worked around me. Moreover, a sense of openness within repeated relations can approximate the mutuality and trust of friendship. For example, if my encounters with the struggling woman have a history of friendliness, she is likely to trust that I am not going to let the bench press fall on her. Socially, I am free to offer to help and she is free to trust me to do so and this slightly thicker but substantially freer dyadic social relation is only possible if the history of friendliness exists. Of course, openness in this sense is only feasible within smaller communities where social distance is relatively minor. However, it must not go overlooked that individuals living in large cities experience small communities since they often go about their daily activities in their own neck of the woods, as it were. My gym is in the heart of Atlanta but it consists of a much smaller community of a few hundred. This limited range of recurrent activity in individuals' lives justifies the prescription of more attentive values for less familiar social relations. Signs of openness in one-time encounters ease interaction and when repeated can cement a relation, such as using the same bank teller. Nevertheless, attentive openness cannot do all the work when taking the range of social relations into consideration; it can only do some of the work. Thus what must be added to the friendship model is a form of

friendship that can provide the openness of friendship vis-à-vis connection but that can also make sense of the distance that exists between members of diverse communities.

Friendships are discursive but this does not mean that friendships generally are open to expansive negotiation. There are aspects of a person that cannot and should not be tempered for the sake of others. And the less familiarity that exists between partners, the less they will open aspects of their personal expression to adjustment. But if friendship aims toward a discursive mutuality, how might unfamiliar institutionally based social relations fit the friendship model where adjustment for the sake of others is not a reasonable expectation? Sibyl Schwarzenbach develops the notion of civic friendship that derives from Aristotle's notion of friendship in the state. She explains that Aristotle defines friendship as the core of all relations exemplified by reciprocal well wishing for the other's own sake and a desire to bring the other's goals to fruition (Schwarzenbach 2009, p.43; Aristotle 1999, bk 8). Aristotle claims that there can be no trust or justice in the state if the public realm is not constituted by friendship relations. Thus, civic friendship is a political notion of friendship that emphasizes the general public concern citizens reveal for one another via laws, institutions, and *everyday* customs (Schwarzenbach 2005, p.234). And though Aristotle's requirements for *philia* seems to block Schwarzenbach's move to broaden civic friendship to the institutional level, Aristotle's use of *philein*, or friendliness, allows her to take this theoretical step. For Schwarzenbach, the difference between friendship and political friendship is merely a matter of scope in intimacy and this degree of difference can be captured by friendly openness.

While Schwarzenbach's conception of civic friendship is political, it serves my framework since it is meant to resolve problems within the social sphere - namely, how individuals respond to and regard one another in interaction. Pace Aristotle, who posits equality as a requirement for friendship in the state, Schwarzenbach makes (moral) equality the goal of public friendship. And the bonds of a morally equal civic friendship are formed through social interactions. First, it stems from ethical reproductive activities that are "directly social and other directed" to "aim at establishing and reestablishing the best of human relationships"(2005, p.240; 2009, p.36, p.39). Through these activities, civic friendship is impersonal enough to span institutional relations but interested enough to create communal bonds of mutuality. Second, the ethical reproductive activities of friendship that motivate compromise in relations can, when generalized, also motivate individuals to yield to others on matters of self-interest and privilege in the interest of fairness, which presents one of the most widely recognized difficulties for relations that exist only for exchanges in institutions (2009, p.55; 2005, p.239). Schwarzenbach states that one of the most elementary facts about human psychology is the need of friendly background conditions to prompt voluntary recessions on behalf of individuals and their self-interest (2005, p.237). Episodic social relations are public in this sense without being specifically political. Friendship norms foster a healthy reflexivity between the public and the social spheres and can bridge the gap that is assumed to exist between them. While this bridging further muddles the bounds of the social sphere of interaction, this blurring serves to highlight how individuals in larger communities are constantly connected. Thus the notion of civic friendship helps demonstrate the feasibility of a 'social' social contract. As I will demonstrate in the following section, if individuals view one another through a friendly lens vis-à-vis ethical reproductive

praxis, the social problems liberal theorists are concerned with - fairness, stability, and conflicting self-interests - can conceivably wane.

Civic friendship so understood is both more and less demanding than the expressions of friendliness in our personal but unfamiliar social relations. In my personal communities of the gym, bank, and grocery store I attempt to be open and welcoming in my casual interactions. But this is not all there is to civic social relations. Personal relations are often episodic but short lived, as when one “bumps into” another when out and about. But our more obviously institutional social relations can be one-time encounters that endure for a length of time, as when individuals come together to participate in charity walks or public discussions. It is in these relations that ethical reproductive activities of friendship promote openness to others’ interests specifically. This is more demanding because it requires us to demonstrate positive concern for others’ suggestions and actions; it is less demanding because the attention is on the interest rather than the person. Again, the line between personal social relations and institutional social relations blur and so the extent to which the freedom seeking individual is attentive to others’ interests (institutional) and expressions (personal) can and should be gauged by how much of either or both is needed to enhance the social relation to its desired end, especially since we do not, and cannot, desire to cultivate social relations with *everyone* we come into contact with - nor are we required to.

### **Defending Friendship**

Friendly relations, even of the civic kind, may, however, seem an excessive mandate for individuals, especially in pluralistic societies; moral and religious differences are often sources of insurmountable division. This is why theories of freedom, specifically liberal theories, posit the weaker toleration relation; that is, individuals need only be tolerant of one another to maintain a minimal sense of social concord. Liberal theories of freedom posit toleration to preserve individual autonomy in the midst of value pluralism and competing comprehensive doctrines (see Rawls 1971, p.213; 1993). Toleration requires that individuals allow one another to privately pursue the values of their chosen personal moralities without demanding they accept or adopt others’ values. For the most part, toleration is primarily demanded on the part of the state through a restriction on coercive measures or policies that would favor one particular religious doctrine or cultural group but individuals are also required to tolerate other individuals and other values for the purpose of stability (Raz 1986, p.403).<sup>9</sup> These two aspects of toleration make it a political concept, which while useful, proves limited for facilitating social exchange given the extent of repeated connectivity in people’s daily routines.

Quite beneficially, Joseph Raz (1986, p.403) expands the notion of toleration. He explains:

Toleration, then, is the curbing of an activity likely to be unwelcome to its recipient or of an inclination so to act which is in itself morally valuable and which is based on a dislike of an antagonism towards that person or a feature of his life, reflecting a judgment that these represent limitations or deficiencies in

him, in order to let that person have his way or in order for him to gain or keep some advantage.

This view of toleration responds better to the needs of social relations insofar as it more closely aligns with specifically social concerns about the difficulties in social interaction that result from pluralism. Its focus is on how individuals behave towards one another rather than on how the state might behave towards individuals in its procedures and decisions.<sup>10</sup> And the aim to avoid unwelcome activities strikes me as an alternative articulation of the value of openness. Yet Raz's construal of a sort of social toleration does not get us as far as we need to go. Even this broader notion of toleration can be, and often is, perceived as either a form of dismissal or total invisibility by those who must be "tolerated", especially because the aim of toleration derives from the dislike of antagonism rather than an appreciation or recognition of the other. For example, if there is only one woman in an otherwise male dominated board meeting, toleration requires that they allow her to speak. Where toleration fails to accommodate the woman's individual social freedom, and the social freedom of the tolerate himself, is that her speech is not taken up by the others and placed into the pool of ideas as a deliberative contribution (even if ultimately rejected). Thus the value of toleration simply requires that one stop speaking and allow another to speak; toleration can be met even if the person relinquishing the floor is counting ceiling tiles as the other speaks.<sup>11</sup>

Individual social freedom is stanchied when confronted with others who merely tolerate them and their values, though less than when not even tolerated. The same is true for those who simply tolerate. Interaction and connectivity are couched in mutuality but toleration permits only one active party; toleration demands no form of the reciprocity that is part and parcel of substantive exchange. And even in short, one-time encounters, exchanges are often substantive even if they are only felt to be so when they go awry. It may be objected that the tolerater's individual simple freedom is impeded by any demands beyond avoiding antagonism. But this objection discounts the specific nature of *social* freedom, which not only necessarily attends to but requires more than one person and her interests for its exercise. One need not always treat others as a friend but one should at least display signs of welcome. The difference in degree of friendliness will depend on the extent to which the social relation is repeated and persists. One's social freedom cannot be impeded by what are, according to this framework, only relatively more demanding moral prescriptions for interaction since social engagement and the freedom within it must be engendered by two active partners. Mutual, active social freedom exercised simultaneously by two or more (even if minimally) invested partners must be mediated through normative edicts whose conditions require mutuality and reciprocity so that they may serve as conduits between the expressions of connected persons. Mutuality and reciprocity need not be robust to exist and minimal efforts made to demonstrate one's being present in an interaction is sufficient to enhance social freedom. The same does not hold true for one-sided values even though they are perfectly adequate for political relations. In a sense, the agent engages in a give-and-take between her two kinds of individual freedom.

Additionally, conceptions of the value of toleration do not permit a clear distinction between hostility and indifference. The difference between hostility and indifference is significant because it helps the individual gauge how to engage the tolerant receiver. It is both



practically crucial and difficult to determine whether someone is hostile or indifferent to the speaker in situations where toleration regulates exchange (acceptance is not an option and this is clear when tolerant behavior is perceived), especially in oppressive relations. Supposing the tolerant receiver is actually hostile, too much interaction could be dangerous. Similarly, the difference between friendship/friendliness and toleration, in relation to social freedom, is couched in the reception - even wholehearted toleration can inadvertently shut one down to some extent whereas something like a friendly rap session will encourage one to *be* (in multiple ways) herself in and through the dialogical relation.<sup>12</sup> While there is obviously some degree of social freedom in relations regulated by toleration it can be increased by moving from an individualistic value to a value fundamental to connection that discourages indifference. And given the feminist interest of expanding freedom in social relations, the ability of stronger moral edicts to accomplish this expansion of social freedom must be taken seriously.

A central aspect of friendship and ethical reproductive practices is positive concern, or interest. Like the (mutual) disinterest associated with tolerant behavior, the positive concern associated with friendship/friendliness can be perceived. Performing “interested” practices on autopilot may be sufficient to meet responsibilities *simpliciter* but mechanical actions are not sufficient to exhibit friendliness. In friendly relations, the motivation or intention of the actor gives that performance value (Friedman 1993, p.214).<sup>13</sup> And just as trustworthiness can be perceived through bodily comportment and facial expressions, so too can friendliness. In contrast to the liberal value of toleration, friendly relations cannot be grounded in mutual disinterest (Friedman 1993, p.214).<sup>14</sup> In social interaction, apparent disinterest only further alienates the one who experiences it. And supposing both parties are mutually disinterested, in what sense can substantive interaction and exchange be said to take place? This point further explains why the value of toleration does not best serve socially free relations.

Because the value of friendship requires friendly others to show positive concern - when and if one chooses to nurture a social relation - a friendship model experiences fewer difficulties demonstrating the possibility of shared agreement than those guided by toleration (Friedman 1993, p.226). The experience of personal friendship helps individuals develop an ‘attitude of respect for persons that can be generalized towards those for whom we have no affection or are even acquainted’, which encourages individuals to yield on their self interest (1993, p.215). As a result, the interaction with a friend can affect or modify one’s self-interest so that a compromise arises; because a friend’s well-being is inherently important, one may be inclined to attend to the friend’s needs or desires even when they conflict with one’s own (1993, p.224). The positive concern shown to others meets the demands of the friendship model since the mutual interest shown can bring discordant interests of social ‘friends’ together.

An objection to models promoting a robust sense of other-interestedness in strangers is that feelings of friendship or affection cannot be made public. That is, affection and positive concern are thought to stem from intimacy and closeness and these sorts of connections cannot be sufficiently generalized to secure social stability or rouse shared agreements. But Schwarzenbach reminds us that theorists have always purported that private emotions are generalizable. One example Schwarzenbach points to is Hobbes’s account of the state of nature, which is explicitly based on a general atmosphere of distrust and fear. Moreover, as all parents know, hate, distrust, and fear must be taught with as much vehemence as other social emotions and habits

(Schwarzenbach 2009, p.140). Children are taught not to talk to, take candy from, or get into cars with strangers. So as important as these practices are to avoiding danger, children are taught to interact with community members colored by a general suspicion of others, which, I imagine, leads to the perception that other people are antagonistic to one's own best interests. Because social values are taught and made public in this way, communal values of other-concern can feasibly become part of the social ethos. Additionally, the values of the friendship model are not mere subjective feelings; Schwarzenbach (2009, p.139) argues that the ethical reproductive practices of civic friendship are objective practices and so can be generalized. Thus, the friendship model should not be rejected out of hand simply because societies have historically practiced habituating negative relational emotions that advance the ideology of individualism rather than positive relational emotions that reflect constant connection.

What about the standard of decency? Might decency provide the requisite minimal sense of other-interestedness for substantive social interaction without making the further demand that individuals be open to one another in friendship-esque relations?<sup>15</sup> As will be shown, I think not. But Cheshire Calhoun (2004) certainly offers a convincing argument to the contrary and her analysis deserves considerable attention. According to Calhoun, decency is a measure-concept; doing the minimally acceptable act marks decency or providing the adequate response, where what is appropriate depends on the situation at hand.<sup>16</sup> A decent act or response passes the minimum bar - but just barely (2004, p.130). Because decency sits at the moral minimum it requires very little risk or expenditure on behalf of the agents. Thus, it is generally a social expectation that individuals provide decent responses or act decently.<sup>17</sup> Calhoun explains that decency is a morally curious concept. It is neither wholly elective nor is it virtuous; it sits somewhere along the line between duties and supererogatory actions. Yet still people are expected to be decent. And even though indecent acts are permissible, the lack of decency brings moral approbation. She uses the example of Scrooge to make this point clear. Scrooge was detested by his fellow neighbors for being indecent yet he never wronged anyone since he paid his workers on time for the time worked. The indecency of his actions came from his refusal to 'bestow gifts' even though he was within his rights to refuse doing so. Calhoun (2004, p.130) explains that the repugnant nature of these actions comes from the social practices that determine what a minimally well-formed moral agent ought to be expected to do without requirement. Those who refuse to partake in social generosity are seen to act senselessly and are, for that reason, considered a poor excuse of a moral agent (2004, p.131, p.136). Morally decent persons are expected to "play nice", as it were, even though the way in which they do so remains open to their discretion (Gilbertson 2003). Decency gives agents room to be morally flawed but demands a certain degree of consideration of others (Risse 2000, p.269). Therefore, decency seems appropriate for social relations.

While decency, like toleration, is an adequate *required* minimum for others' social freedom, it is too minimal a value to promote in a society - or individual - aiming for robust social freedom.<sup>18</sup> Like the tolerant person who allows others to speak but does not listen, the decent person does only those minimally socially gracious acts that are expected of him as a respectable moral agent. In each case, the actor is not doing anything *for* the other, which, as I have argued, increases one's own social freedom as well as the other's; he is doing what is expected of him. A common response is that others need not act for reasons or intentions with others in mind to

exercise their freedom.<sup>19</sup> This is true but again, only for the purpose of securing individual simple freedom. The fact that individual social freedom is defined by social interaction - and so partially constituted by how and why others interact with us - makes agent intention in response germane. And just as knowing I am being “tolerated” dampens my enthusiasm and so changes my set of intentions (and knowing that I am simply tolerating can prohibit myself from experiencing an enthusiastic or even pleasant interaction with another), knowing that someone considers her interaction with me as the ‘decent’ thing to do changes my appreciation of a perceived kindness into a sort of affront. When someone acts decently towards another, it may be the case that the person who has been decently received walks away from the interaction feeling like a charity case while the person who is decent feels pumped with personal pride at being so darn decent.

Of course, there is a hidden distinction between a person aiming to *be* decent and a person aiming to *do* the decent thing. The first has the other in mind and the other, at least on a sort of folk or colloquial understanding, does not. Aiming to be a decent person more closely resembles being a kind person - and I think this is what is meant when we describe people as such; this is distinct from acting decently. One who aims for decency - the moral minimum, does not seem to be describable as kind. Kindness is a value that belongs to the family of friendship norms insofar as kindness is a precondition for developing healthy friendships (an enduring relation lacking kindness is termed *frienemies*). Moreover, acting decently seems to be separable from both the acting and receiving agent, which carries with it a similar - though weaker - sense of detachment to that which accompanies toleration. It is this sense, that of doing the decent thing or acting decently that seems to be required to mediate social exchange by the decency norm conceived of as a minimal measuring concept. Imagine the affluent person who drops a dollar on a homeless person as she passes. This is certainly an example of a decent act but the fact that there is no action beyond the moral minimum is clear.<sup>20</sup> Though people get all fired up when they do not get what is expected - in their view of decency - they are well aware of when that is all they get. The potential for a lack of positive concern in decent acts shows how minimal the moral standard of social expectation can be and this can be experienced quite deeply by those on the receiving end. So even if one aims to increase her social freedom through the value of decency, this could only generate an improvement for her, if she previously engaged with others below the moral minimum (though at that point, any improvement would be good for freedom). For individuals who want to better their freedom with others, acting beyond the moral minimum seems crucial to giving another the reciprocal motivation for fuller engagement. Thus again, positive concern explains why the friendship model is better suited to socially free relations than one of the traditional liberal values.

There remains one more obstacle to vetting the friendship model for a theory of social freedom. Because social freedom is concerned with social relations, I must show how it is that the friendship model can account for social relations that are composed of asymmetrical roles. Asymmetrical social roles are relations such as teacher/student, doctor/patient, parent/child, etc., where there is a clear power differential between individuals who occupy specific roles. The teacher, doctor, etc. are believed to know better and so are expected to be obeyed for the sake of other’s best interest. These social relations might create problems for friendship norms since they are considered hierarchical. Yet authority and hierarchical relations are distinct (Addelson 1991, p.52). Hierarchy denotes a value laden ordering, such that the person above is generally more

valuable than the one below. Authority positions denote expertise; the person in the position of authority may have power over the other but the area within which that power may be exerted is limited to the area of expertise and only while occupying those specific roles e.g. Monday through Friday. Hierarchical relations, on the other hand, last so long as the one with power can maintain it over as much area of the other's life as possible e.g. the controlling husband or the corrupt teacher. The power or privilege held by the person in the top spot in a hierarchical relation is desired, enjoyed or exploited, and not easily relinquished. The power held by the person in the position of authority is held with reluctance and care, exercised with propriety when necessary. The student must follow the teacher's directives but the teacher only gives the directives she does to help the student no longer need instruction. Social relations based on asymmetrical roles are not themselves hierarchical and so are not antithetical to a feminist friendship model.

Even though social roles are often asymmetrical, they can incorporate friendship values to enhance social freedom. There is a distinction between roles and the interactions that transpire to meet the relation demands. Social freedom concerns individuals and their exchanges; it is only indirectly about their roles. The social freedom within that specific relationship of student and teacher is determined by how they interact together. Like most social relationships, the student and teacher may not choose one another. But whether or not they are together voluntarily, they must deal with one another and how they do so says a lot about how freedom gets exercised. The student may try to make the teacher's life a living hell because she knows the teacher must remain within the range of professional conduct. Or, the teacher may give inappropriate directives or even instructions meant to cause the student harm. Here, the social freedom of one within the relationship is intentionally limited by the other, especially since it is unlikely either has the freedom within formal, institutional social relation to exit, even if the relation is successful or productive in other ways.

Friendship norms, then, are especially relevant to social relations of these kinds since the relations endure longer than episodic run-ins with community members. Where community members may exercise social freedom in relations with one another governed by civic friendship or friendliness, social relations comprised of roles ought to be couched as a stronger bond. Since these sorts of relations are more personal, it makes sense to think of the relationship as approximating actual friendship, though one limited by the roles. Although it may be appropriate to be reserved when dealing with authoritative person, the reservation attaches to the context and not the person. If I am in a job interview and the interviewer and I adhere to friendship norms, I still must act professionally. But if the relationship fosters the social freedom of both the interviewer and myself, I will not need to restrict my individuality out of fear of the interviewer's personal rejection of how I perform professionalism qua my (wildly enthusiastic) individuality. To prescribe friendship norms in such relations is not the same as prescribing that the individuals become actual friends. The defining asymmetry of the role relation precludes that. However, *pace* Friedman, asymmetrical role relations do not rule out the mutuality of personal friendship (1993, p.190).<sup>21</sup> In fact, mutuality is crucial to these relations to keep them from collapsing into hierarchical relations. The greater the asymmetry the more individuals need to demonstrate that they take one another seriously; and such respect and attention are defining features of friendship (1993, p.189, p.192).

There remains one difficulty for this model: the properly hierarchical, oppressive relation. This relation, though my primary motivation for developing the social freedom framework, presents the largest hurdle. While many community members have good intentions but need some consciousness raising and inspiration to adjust their social values, some people do not desire change since moral progress would eat away at the social power they hold at the expense of others' lack of power, such as being considered the default authority in matters such as knowledge, behavior, trustworthiness, etc. This is deeply problematic because the death-grip some have on their privilege is unintentional and entrenched. But as many have shown and as I intimated in my discussion of liberal values, privilege is safely hidden and protected by social ideological norms that over emphasize individual simple freedom. My goal as a feminist liberation theorist is to respond to the needs of those seeking moral and social progress and I believe that strong theoretical prescriptions that work to undermine individualistic ideologies are an important complement to the work activists do. It is the work done by those with progress as their objective that can encroach upon the status quo of hierarchy and oppression. I believe the promotion and instantiation of friendship norms within communities by some is one key form of resistance to those who fight to maintain privilege. Moreover, if privileged persons adopt friendship norms in their own un-inclusive relations, their habituation can eventually permeate other relations and possibly – hopefully - lessen oppressive biases.

## Conclusion

Friendship is a preferable and plausible social value for regulating social relations and expanding individual social freedom within the social sphere. While the values of liberal theory, such as toleration and decency, are suitable for regulating relations within the political sphere, feminists are correct to maintain that those values are of little use to relations of social interdependence. If the social contract tradition is to endure as the paramount framework for social and political relations, more attention must be given to the specifically social component of the social contract. For this reason, the friendship model is not only a much needed addition to feminist ethics but it also contributes to and advances the work done in the liberal and social contract tradition.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Most notably Rawls, though the concept originated with the modern liberal social contract theorists. The value of toleration can be traced to Locke and Mill.
  - <sup>2</sup> The term “mutual disinterest” is Rawls’s. 1971, p.144.
  - <sup>3</sup> This claim is anecdotal rather than empirical.
  - <sup>4</sup> Because social freedom requires interaction, it cannot be reduced to negative liberty.
  - <sup>5</sup> For more on Aristotle’s position on friendship see: Aristotle 1999; Lynch 2005; Pangle 2003.
  - <sup>6</sup> Because this level of familiarity does not extend far beyond our communities, the friendship model would not be adequate for political or economic relations.
  - <sup>7</sup> The notion of friendship is limited by duty, see: Stocker 1987; 1990.
  - <sup>8</sup> Recognition does not necessitate sharing.
  - <sup>9</sup> Although in the literature it appears as if the value and importance is on the variety of values rather than on the variety of individuals.

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- <sup>10</sup> It is not necessary for pluralism to obtain for social oppression to obtain. I speak on the issue of pluralism because 1) traditional theories pursue toleration as a result of their pluralistic surroundings and 2) individuals are likely to be more aware of the freedom inhibiting nature of oppressive relations if they take place within a pluralistic community; disadvantage is much harder to notice when it is the norm.
- <sup>11</sup> Hollenbach (1996, p.150) defines toleration similarly, as the avoidance of conflict.
- <sup>12</sup> This is not to assume that there is never a time in which friends must tolerate aspects of one another, only that sheer toleration is detached.
- <sup>13</sup> Relations of dependence require us to look at mechanical performances of care differently.
- <sup>14</sup> Mutual disinterest is one of the foundation values of Rawls' framework. The claim that toleration derives from disinterest is my own.
- <sup>15</sup> For distinctions between decency and the supererogatory, see Brännmark 2006; Urmson 1969; Wolf 1986.
- <sup>16</sup> Calhoun is a feminist ethicist. I use her analysis because her account best captures the range and limits of decency for social relations.
- <sup>17</sup> The more common argument is that decency is a character trait and that even if one behaves decently, she will not be a decent person without having the appropriate intention. I accept this line of argument. See: Brännmark 2006; Risse 2000, p.263.
- <sup>18</sup> Although I accept Calhoun's claim that decency is not taxing, others maintain that decency must be costly and/ or risky. See: Nuyen 2002
- <sup>19</sup> This exemplifies negative liberty.
- <sup>20</sup> A requirement of decency for institutions is sufficient. Avishai Margalit (1996) defines a decent society as one where the institutions do not humiliate its people; a decent society aims at social freedom institutionally, 1996.
- <sup>21</sup> Lawrence Blum makes a similar point, 1990.

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